

MONROE COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT

TODD L. ZIEGLER
CIRCUIT JUDGE - BRANCH I

DIANE BERENDES
Register in Probate

KRISTINE JOSTAD
Juvenile Clerk

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DENISE SECRIST
Judicial Assistant

PEGGY A. FOSTER
Court Reporter

October 22, 2007

To Whom it May Concern:

I am one of two Circuit Court Judges in Monroe County. I was recently elected and started on August 1, 2007. Prior to becoming a Circuit Court Judge, I practiced law in Monroe County for 11 years. I apologize that I am unable to be present for this public hearing. Given the short notice, I am unable to make arrangements to be there as my case load will not allow it.

Monroe County is in need of a third Circuit Court Judge. In the 2006 Judicial Needs Assessment, Monroe County was assessed at having a need for 3.8 judges. This is a need for almost double the judges we currently do have.

In my experience as an attorney, it was always much more difficult to schedule matters in Monroe County than in the other surrounding counties, especially hearings of any length. A hearing that could be scheduled in a week or two in another county may take a month or longer to schedule in Monroe County. As a result, some individuals are not receiving their day in court in a timely manner with some hearings being continued to a later date when the hearings cannot be finished in the time allotted.

Judges and other court personnel in Monroe County work hard and make every effort to make timely hearings with calendars that are completely full most days. While a third judge would not meet the 3.8 judges needed, it would allow Monroe County to provide more timely hearings to the citizens as they deserve. Justice delayed is often justice denied.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,


Todd L. Ziegler
Circuit Judge - Branch I

TLZ:ds

JUNEAU COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

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Testimony of Scott Harold Southworth, Juneau County District Attorney 2007 Assembly Bill 393

Committee on Corrections and Courts October 23, 2007

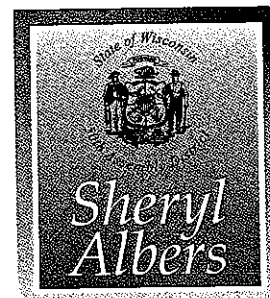
Members of the Assembly Committee on Corrections and Courts:

I write in support of 2007 Assembly Bill 393, which would add circuit court branches in seven counties, including Juneau County. The caseload in Juneau County continues to remain extraordinarily high, especially relative to cases involving the District Attorney's Office. In 2006 alone, our office handled 2,706 new cases, including 985 criminal matters. Combined with the number of civil cases filed each year in Juneau County, it is impossible for one circuit court judge to handle all of these cases.

Our criminal justice system in Juneau County and all across Wisconsin is overburdened and understaffed. This bill recognizes some of the most dire judicial needs. However, the Legislative Audit Bureau recently found that Wisconsin is also short 132 prosecutors. With low pay and extraordinary caseloads, over 50% of our experienced prosecutors have quit in the past 6 years. Moreover, the Office of the State Public Defender is so short on personnel and funding that county judges are routinely forced to appoint local counsel for indigent defendants at property taxpayer expense.

To protect the public, provide victims with justice and ensure those accused of crimes are treated fairly, our criminal justice system needs a rapid influx of personnel and financial resources. I do not advocate raising taxes to accomplish this. Rather, I implore the Legislature to make the funding of our criminal justice system a priority in the distribution of limited taxpayer resources. This legislation is a step in the right direction.

I want to thank Representative Sheryl Albers and Senator Lena Taylor for the introduction of this important piece of legislation, and express my appreciation to each committee member for carefully considering measures like in response to the crises we face in our criminal justice system.



Assembly Bill 393
Assembly Committee on Corrections and the Courts
415 NW, State Capitol
October 23, 2007

Thank you Representative Bies and committee members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 393 relating to adding a circuit court branch in Juneau County and six other rural Wisconsin counties. For Juneau County, this proposal means better use of the dollars afforded us and better efficiency of court proceedings.

Juneau County completed this facility in September 2002. The facility offers three courtrooms, three judge offices, three Court Reporter/Judicial assistant offices, and two jury rooms for deliberation. The facility is ready for its second court. Juneau County Court operates with a second court thanks to the reserve judges who provide assistance six days a month to the one sitting judge. The efficiency of the court is lacking because scheduling over 100 cases a day is overwhelming and that's how the court must operate now with the rotating schedule of reserve judges and one sitting judge.

Two correctional facilities, Sand Ridge Secure Treatment and New Lisbon Correctional, have added to the burden of the one Juneau County court. Economically, these facilities have benefited the community; however, the financial burden these additional cases have placed on this court is outstanding – see prosecutorial position document.

Long term operation of the Juneau County Court will benefit greatly by having one more court added as soon as possible.

The WI State Courts agrees that Juneau County needs one full court. While more courts are needed statewide, Juneau County constructed this court and embraced the department of corrections construction of a facility on the promise that an additional court would be afforded. To date that promise has not been met. This bill can't move forward because of its cost without an emergency declaration by the governor and this he has not done. Perhaps were this bill to land in Joint Finance, such a determination could be timely made. The difficulty Juneau County and other counties have is that spring elections are around the corner and the effective date is such that election dates would be relied upon to fill these positions. For an immediate reduction in cost the bill would need to be modified to allow for immediate appointment.

Action on creating additional courts is long overdue. On behalf of Juneau County I welcome any action that would allow for timely remedy to insure that each and every party's case is timely taken up. Our window of opportunity is very short. This legislation must be enacted by both houses signed by the Governor, and published by November 15, 2007 in order for judges to run for election on the spring 2008 ballot. I thank you for taking AB 393 up in a timely manner and appreciate your moving it through the process with consideration and haste.